

A
S E R M O N,
ON THE
P R O G R E S S
OF
DIVINE REVELATION.

[Price ONE SHILLING.]



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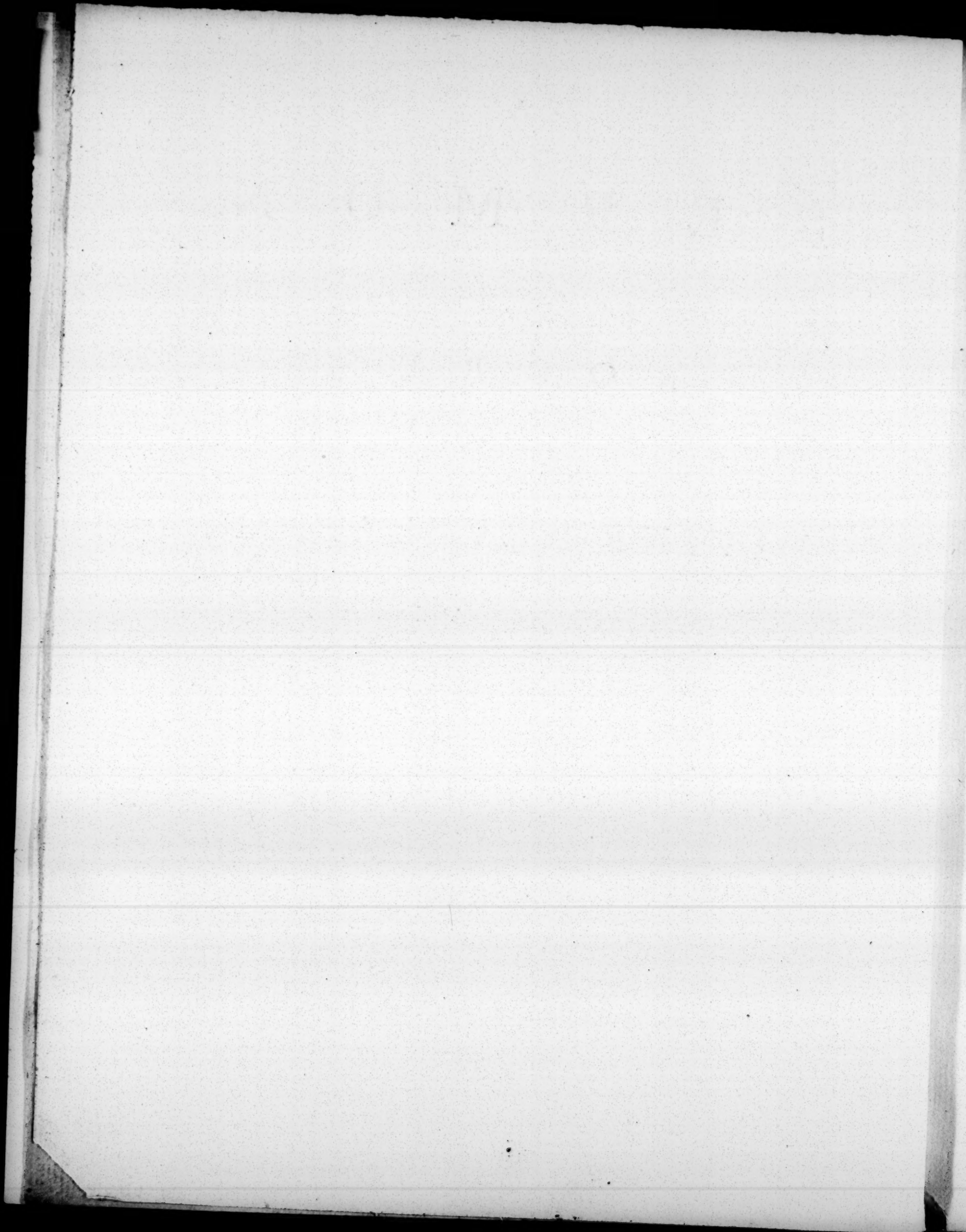
DIVINE REVELATION,

PREACHED on *Sunday*, April 13, 1788.

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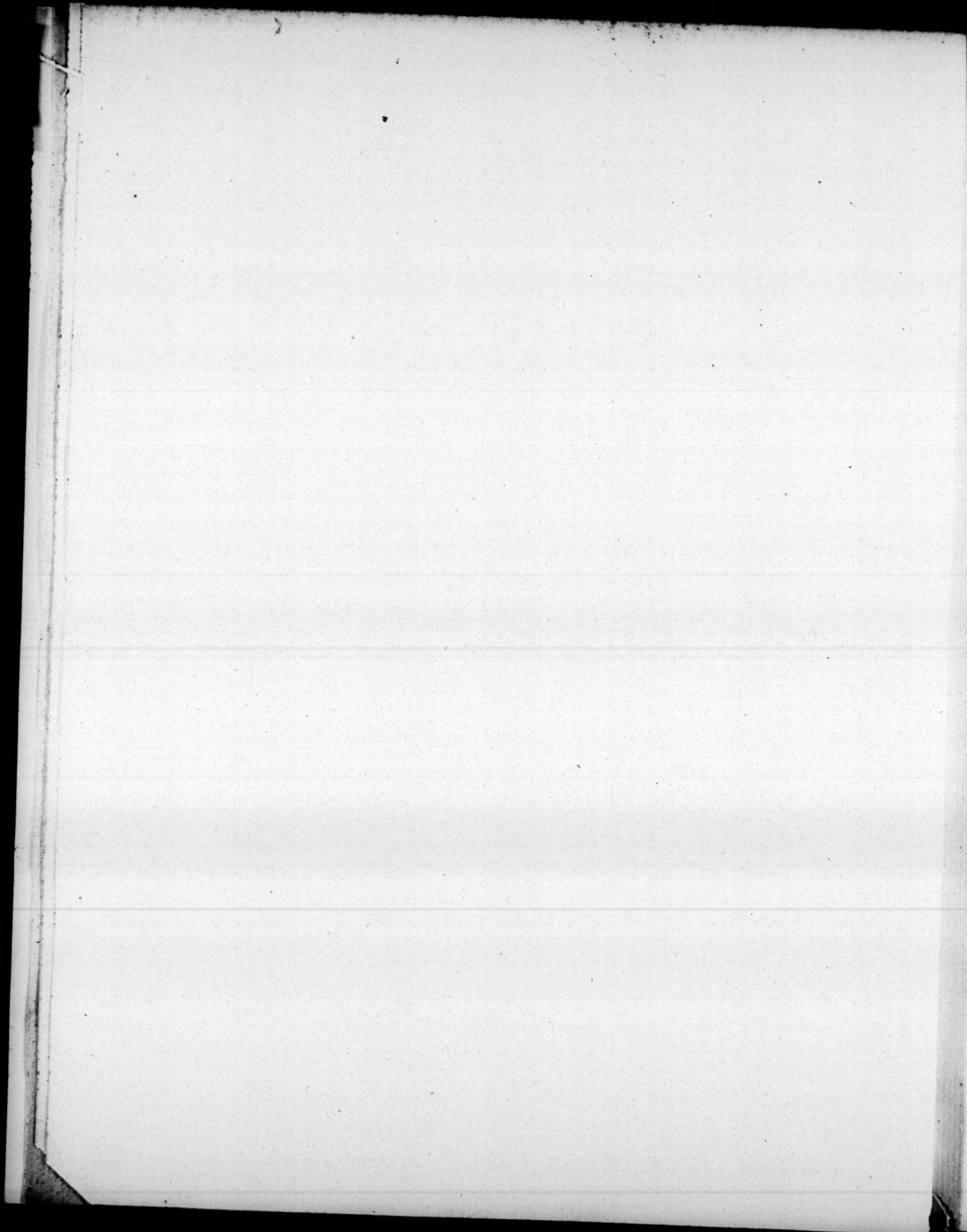
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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Sermon was delivered to a numerous and respectable audience; but has since been a little compressed. The public, to whose candour it is now submitted, will not feel themselves interested in the reason of its publication. The writer, on his part, though he is not sanguine enough to hope for distinguished approbation, is ready to acknowledge his disappointment, if it should be judged wholly undeserving the notice of Criticism.



A
S E R M O N.

MATT. Chap. v. Verse 17.

THINK NOT THAT I AM COME TO DESTROY THE LAW
AND THE PROPHETS; I AM NOT COME TO DESTROY,
BUT TO FULFIL.

AT a period so remote as the present from the christian æra, it is not wonderful that many parts of the New Testament should not be intelligible to unlearned minds. The continual references to customs of the Jewish nation, many of them peculiar to the time and place; the difuse of those languages, in which the scriptures were originally written, and the inadequacy of the best translations; nay, changes in the very genius of literature, and objects of human science, have created difficulties and obscurities, for which not all the labours of learning and ingenuity are sufficient entirely to compensate.

But we have still in the holy scriptures resources of much more admirable and important information, that is attainable

able by persons of every description, however deficient in parts and learning. If the New Testament refers to religious ceremonies, that no longer remain in the christian service, we easily recollect the history of their institution and establishment in the preceding volume; and whenever we meet with other accidental allusions, which are not at once perspicuous, we have always at least the satisfaction to find, that our acquaintance with them was by no means essential to the christian faith.

Our religious knowledge is commonly distinguished into two parts; the one, which is obtained by the use of unassisted reason, and the other, which we more immediately receive from heaven by revelation. But this distinction, I think, is not always evident and satisfactory: for it is not easy to determine whether many divine revelations, to the full conviction of which our minds have been early habituated, may not appear to us as natural, as a knowledge that is acquired with difficulty, though merely by the use of reason. As, however, a method generally known may better elucidate the subject, than even one more just without such a preparative advantage, I shall not lose sight of this, in comparing our Lord's assertion in the text before us, with some general observations on the progress of religious knowledge from the creation of the world to the establishment of Christianity.

While

While the world and religion were in their infancy, and the human mind unaccustomed to philosophical reflection and experience, we find the deficiency supplied by divine revelations; which were peculiarly adapted to the times and particular occasions on which they were manifested, and widely different from those, which were imparted afterwards, when science had made greater advances. Mankind were then generally engaged in the tillage of the ground for their immediate subsistence, and the mind was almost entirely left to its sensations. Accordingly, we read of more immediate, more ordinary, and frequent communications of the will of the Almighty in those times, generally for the institution of *practical*, though mysterious services, and of which the authority was enforced, even by *sensible* manifestations of the divine presence.

Subsequent generations have been far otherwise circumstanced; and we see a proportionate difference in the communication of God's commands. Whereas hitherto they had been accompanied by *sensible appearances* from heaven, we observe, that these are succeeded among the Israelites by the spirit of prophecy only; and among those idolatrous nations, who descended from apostates of other families, human philosophy poorly compensated for the loss of divine illuminations. However wonderfully successful in the various pursuits of art and literature, after the most laborious metaphysical researches, here they are only able to discern, that there is an
immortal

immortal first cause of all things, a wise, and great, and beneficent Divinity, with the melancholy conclusion, that to them He was "unknown." Even the boasted ancients of Greece and Rome seem to sit down fatigued and hopeless, and divert themselves with a little fanciful mythology, where was no rest for the soul.

To the peculiar people of God, the revelation of the Almighty, his law, and his promises, were however constantly continued: And they were frequently reminded by the prophets to preserve the purity of their worship, and their obedience to the ordinances of the law. That thus they should always maintain their temporal independency amongst the powerful nations that surrounded them, and procure to themselves, both collectively and individually, the particular favour and protection of the Lord their God.

But as this law, so "holy, just, and good," agreeable to the nature of its divine author, did not obtain an entire compliance, which, from personal experience, no one can doubt; and as nothing less than a perfect obedience can be accepted by Him, who "is of purer eyes than to behold evil," therefore "by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified;" a sentence of "condemnation which passeth upon all men," not only through the transgression of our first parents, but by the actual imperfection of every man's personal obedience; for "there is none righteous, no not one."

"What

“ What advantage then hath the Jew, or what profit is
 “ there of the circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, be-
 “ cause that unto them were committed the oracles of God.”
 Much every way, says the apostle: so excellent a moral law
 surely was profitable; it was no inconsiderable advantage, that
 all the “ fresh springs” of religion should be in Judah; but
 chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles
 of God, the inestimable promises of a future redemption.

Thus our divine Master was an object of faith to Abraham
 and his descendants, as well as to us, who in succeeding ages
 have distinguished ourselves by his name: they were required
 to believe in the promises of the Old Testament, we, in their
 accomplishment, by the New; and both we and they to rest
 our sole hopes of salvation on the mediation and merits of the
 same Messiah. Of them, indeed, a less particular creed was
 required, because it could not be given upon so full an evi-
 dence. They were required to believe that “ God would
 “ provide himself a Lamb” for sacrifice, who should “ be-
 “ come their salvation,” and answer the description given
 them in the sacred writings; should “ fulfil” at once the types
 of the law, and the predictions of the prophets. But for *us*
 was reserved the fullest light; when the “ day-spring from
 “ on high” visited the world, that cloud of obscurity, which
 had surrounded the Jewish mysteries, like “ the vail of the
 “ temple, was rent in twain,” and the mercy-seat of salvation
 was discovered to our view.

B

As

As therefore we are favoured with so clear a revelation, so of us is expected a very particular faith. *We* must acknowledge, not only that the Almighty has provided a sufficient atonement for the sins of the world; but that this atonement was actually made, and the types and prophecies concerning it fulfilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth; that He being the only-begotten Son of God, came down from heaven, and took the human nature upon Him; and after having passed on earth a life of the severest affliction, was “crucified for our transgressions, and raised again for our “justification.”

With regard to religious ceremonies, it may be proper to observe, that in scripture the Gentile nations are ever considered as apostates from the worship of the true and living God: and accordingly, however the principles may be destroyed, we generally find in their ritual observances, some faint traces of such an original. Of this, many particular instances might be given, but it will be sufficient to mention this general remark, that every form of pagan worship required sacrifices far more numerous and sanguinary than the law of Moses. It is therefore doing no great violence to probability to suppose, that sometimes they might retain vague notions of the revealed doctrine of atonement by blood; and at other times observing the particular providence that protected the Children of Israel, they might imitate

imitate their religious ordinances, even though ignorant of the principle on which they were performed.

The ritual parts of Judaism were so many types of that great and glorious sacrifice, which should be once offered for the sins of the whole world: and they were instituted among that people, who were favoured with those "exceeding great and precious promises," in order to keep awake in them a lively expectation of their Redeemer, and to evince in his coming the faithfulness of God. But when this end of their institution was completed, the external forms were no longer necessary, and therefore were by our Saviour immediately abrogated and superseded: yet "think not, says He, that I am come to destroy the law, and the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." The promulgation of the Gospel confirmed the Jewish religion, and reformed that of Samaria; its divine author laboured continually to clear and defend their genuine doctrines from the innovation and traditions of men; the idolatries of the Gentiles He did indeed "destroy;" He brought them out of pagan darkness into his marvelous light, and taught them, together with "the children of the inheritance," that henceforth less solicitous about place and ceremonies, they should "worship the Father in spirit and in truth."

Till the publication of christianity, every form of religion, both Jewish and Gentile, had an expensive establishment and
a local

a local station. Besides the support of a numerous ministry, in those times the devotion of the pious cost them frequent and laborious journeys to the place of worship, and the richest offerings when they came there. But our Lord relieved mankind from these heavy burdens, giving us in their place only two sacred institutions; the one, whereby we enlist under the banner of Christ, and become members of his church; the other, which we celebrate in remembrance of his death, and of the inestimable benefits that we obtain by it. Two sacraments are the only ceremonies that are essential to the christian religion. This is the "light burden" that is laid upon us; or rather let us not consider those ordinances as burdensome, which are the pledges of our Saviour's love. The former sacrament has already been celebrated once for all: but one now remains for our observance. How unpardonable are we if we neglect it! "If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? How much rather when he saith unto thee, Wash and be clean."

To conclude. Our christian freedom, from the errors of idolatry, and the laborious observance of religious ceremonies, ought to encrease our attention and regard to the principles of our faith, those sacred doctrines which were ultimately signified, both by the expressive types of the Mosaic institutions, and by the far-corrupted and abominable sacrifices of the nations. How anxiously ought we to guard our christian fortress; how faithfully adhere to the "form of sound words," which we
 " have

“ have received;” and how much dread the danger of accommodating our tenets to the prejudices of others, when we reflect on those infatuated apostates, whose religion, by similar means, and in no great length of time, became so lamentably corrupted, that they offered “ even their sons and their daughters unto devils.”

F I N I S.



